



# Preventing childhood trauma and maltreatment

July 18, 2019

Northern New Mexico, like many areas, faces challenges around substance misuse, low school achievement and underemployment, and there are positive initiatives that seek to address these challenges individually. However, an initiative that launched on July 1 at Northern New Mexico College takes a different approach to making a difference by focusing on these challenges' root cause: childhood trauma.

The [Anna, Age Eight Institute](#), named for the influential book written by the institute's co-founders Katherine Ortega Courtney and Dominic Cappello, is based on current research that adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, produce lifelong adverse impacts on learning, behavior and health. (The books is [available to download free](#) of charge.)

ACEs include physical and emotional neglect; physical, emotional and sexual abuse; and living in households where adults misuse substances, have mental health challenges, are violent to partners, parents are separated, or a family member is incarcerated.

These experiences can lead to substance misuse, lower school achievement levels and lower access to higher education, negative medical and emotional health consequences – all of which have negative financial impacts on taxpayers and the local economy.

“We connect the dots between safe childhoods, student achievement and finding success with work and family life. Addressing childhood trauma is far more than a health challenge, it's an economic development issue for every region,” says Cappello.

## A data-driven approach

Identifying the impact of childhood trauma is one thing, but preventing adverse experiences will take a new collaborative approach – one in which Los Alamos National Laboratory and its operator Triad National Security, LLC, is happy to be playing a part.

“The Anna, Age Eight Institute will provide New Mexico with its first agency devoted exclusively to the data-driven, cross-sector and collaborative prevention of childhood trauma and promotion of thriving families and communities,” says Ortega Courtney.

The first stage is to assess the challenges, and the access children and adults currently have to services. The second step is to plan solutions with a cross-sector approach, involving local government, nonprofits, businesses and other organizations.

Next comes implementation, with the institute providing technical assistance and support for the effective use of data and technology. Continuous evaluation tracks the impact of all work and guides improvement.

## Based at Northern New Mexico College

The Anna, Age Eight Institute is based at Northern New Mexico College and has a goal of working across the whole state, with an early focus on Northern New Mexico.

Rio Arriba County has been a pilot site for the initiative, and the county's stakeholders have already started meeting to work on creating a stronger system of health, safety and education to reduce historic challenges and increase health outcomes, student retention, performance and graduation rates.

Triad National Security is supporting Anna, Age Eight partner United Way of Northern New Mexico (UWNNM) with a grant of \$121,500, and UWNNM will be using a part of those funds in their work with the institute.

Working to support safe childhoods, resilient families and healthy communities is a key objective of Triad's commitment to the region, so we at the Laboratory look forward to helping the Anna, Age Eight Institute in their crucial work.

—Kathy Keith

Director, Community Partnerships Office at Los Alamos National Laboratory

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